

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A method of producing metal or metal alloy granules, in the method comprising:

preparing a metal or a metal alloy having non-metallic inclusions comprising oxides of the base metal;

pelletizing the metal or the alloy with a reducing agent in order to form the granules;

processing the granules in a vacuum so that the reducing agent reacts on the inclusions;

and

purifying the granules by eliminating a surface layer from the granules,

wherein the surface layer contains a greater concentration of impurities than a center of the granules.

Claim 2 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the eliminating comprises abrasion.

Claim 3 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the eliminating includes tribofinishing the granules.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): The method according to claim 1, wherein the eliminating ~~is includes performed by means of a vibrating~~ the granules in an enclosure.

Claim 5 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the thickness of the eliminated layer lies in the range 0.1 mm to 0.5 mm.

Claim 6 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the metal is selected from chromium, titanium, vanadium, molybdenum, manganese, niobium, tungsten, and nickel, and the alloy comprises at least one of the above metals and/or boron.

Claim 7 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the alloy is a ferro-alloy.

Claim 8 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the preparing makes use of an aluminothermic reaction between at least one metal oxide and divided aluminum.

Claim 9 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 8, wherein the aluminothermic reaction is unbalanced due to a shortage of aluminum relative to the quantity of aluminum needed for a complete reaction so as to ensure that the metal or the alloy contains reducible non-metallic inclusions mainly constituted by inclusions of the oxide of the base metal.

Claim 10 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein after the pelletizing, the granules are baked at a temperature in the range 200°C to 230°C.

Claim 11 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the processing the granules is performed in a vacuum oven.

Claim 12 (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein after the processing the granules, the product is cooled in a neutral atmosphere.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): A method of producing metal or metal alloy granules, the method comprising:

preparing a metal or a metal alloy having non-metallic inclusions comprising oxides of the base metal;

pelletizing the metal or the alloy with a reducing agent to form the granules;

processing the granules in a vacuum so that the reducing agent reacts on the inclusions;

and

purifying the granules by eliminating a surface layer from the granules, wherein elimination is performed by means of a by vibrating the granules in an enclosure, wherein the surface layer contains a greater concentration of impurities than a center of the granules.

Claim 14 (Previously Presented): A method of producing metal or metal alloy granules, the method comprising:

preparing a metal or a metal alloy having non-metallic inclusions comprising oxides of the base metal;

pelletizing the metal or the alloy with a reducing agent to form the granules;

processing the granules in a vacuum so that the reducing agent reacts on the inclusions;

and

eliminating a surface layer from the granules, wherein the thickness of the eliminated layer is in the range of 0.1 mm to 0.5 mm.

Claim 15 (Currently Amended): A method of producing metal or metal alloy granules, the method comprising:

preparing a metal or a metal alloy having non-metallic inclusions comprising oxides of the base metal;

pelletizing the metal or the alloy with a reducing agent to form the granules;

processing the granules in a vacuum so that the reducing agent reacts on the inclusions;

and

purifying the granules by eliminating a surface layer from the granules, wherein the metal is selected from chromium, titanium, vanadium, molybdenum, manganese, niobium, tungsten, and nickel, and the alloy comprises at least one of chromium, titanium, vanadium, molybdenum, manganese, niobium, tungsten, and nickel and/or boron,
wherein the surface layer contains a greater concentration of impurities than a center of the granules.

Claim 16 (Currently Amended): A method of producing metal alloy granules, the method comprising:

preparing a metal alloy having non-metallic inclusions comprising oxides of the base metal;

pelletizing the alloy with a reducing agent to form the granules;

processing the granules in a vacuum so that the reducing agent reacts on the inclusions;

and

purifying the granules by eliminating a surface layer from the granules, wherein the alloy is a ferro-alloy,
wherein the surface layer contains a greater concentration of impurities than a center of the granules.

Claim 17 (Currently Amended): A method of producing metal or metal alloy granules, the method comprising:

preparing a metal or a metal alloy having non-metallic inclusions comprising oxides of the base metal;

pelletizing the metal or the alloy with a reducing agent to form the granules;

processing the granules in a vacuum so that the reducing agent reacts on the inclusions;
and

purifying the granules by eliminating a surface layer from the granules, wherein the preparing the metal includes an aluminothermic reaction between at least one metal oxide and divided aluminum, wherein the surface layer contains a greater concentration of impurities than a center of the granules.